

**TOPIC:**

**Does the election of President Barack Obama  
represent the fulfillment of Dr. Martin Luther King's  
dream or is it only one milestone along a longer road to  
full equality?**

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*"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." – Dr. Martin Luther King*

On November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, Barack Obama created history by being the first African-American to be elected as President of the United States of America. This will forever be a turning point in black history. But does Obama's election fulfill the dream and vision that Martin Luther King foresaw? In my estimation, a dream based on the concepts of equality and equity has not been fully realized as yet. It is no doubt that the election of an African-American to the highest position in America, and arguably the world, is of great significance. However, have coloured people been fully liberated from their "manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination"? I think not.

Many achievements and advances have been made, especially where coloured people are concerned in America. Today, we see that some of the richest people in the world are actually African-Americans. Concurrently, we have seen that determination, hard-work and integrity can propel a man, of any race or colour, to one of the most revered positions in the world. However, it would be erroneous of us to believe that our coloured brethren live in the equitable and equal America that Dr. Martin Luther King envisioned. Although the extent to which black people are marginalized has been greatly decreased, the fact remains that there is still much racial discrimination in America. President Barack Obama is living testimony that there is still some racial discrimination. Throughout his campaign he received many threats and warnings, and some people even speculated as to whether he would be assassinated. Although in the past many people have been subjected to these same indiscretions, some worse off than others, such as John F. Kennedy who was assassinated; his threats had an additional message behind them. This message was the intolerance of his race by racist extremists.

Despite the fresh and stainless image of Barack Obama, a man who symbolizes the progress of African-Americans, there is still controversy over his past, his beliefs and his views on race. A man born of a white mother and a black father, yet raised primarily by his maternal grandparents had achieved so much considering that the Civil Rights Movement was only about 60 years ago. This meteoric rise of Barack Obama has come not only as a shock but as yet another step towards racial equality in America. Here is a black man defying all odds by attending the best schools, even ascending into traditionally "white" posts such as the editor of the Harvard Law Review. He was well loved by the people of America, be they white or black or any other race. Obama did not speak of black consciousness, or of revenge for the racial ill-treatment blacks had faced for years. Obama spoke of equality, of equity, and of integrity. In this light Barack Obama represented a catalyst of change and that is what America longed for. That is what Dr. King dreamed of. But this change is not yet complete.

In King's speech he stated that "we can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality". Nevertheless, African-Americans are still seen as a threat to not only society but themselves as they are always portrayed in drug and gun related crimes. Even civil matters see mainly black offenders. The arrest of Henry Lewis Gates Jr., is one of the most recent examples of the racist scourge that putrefies America's society of late. By saying that Sergeant James Crowley "acted stupidly", Obama triggered a debate on race and people began to question his ideology. People ignored the fact that this man was a close friend of President Obama and instead transmuted this into a race controversy. As if it were not bad enough that Obama made such a reckless statement, everyone knows of his affiliation with Rev. Wright, an outspoken racist. Additionally, Obama was further chided for his upbringing in a Muslim home which caused some to

wonder if he had extremist views. His admittance of using alcohol, marijuana and cocaine further fueled the stereotype of his race. He was a black man and thus some people suspected his involvement in some illegal activities. Considering these examples of Obama's life both before and after his election, it is clear to see that King's dream still has a long way to go, especially where racial stereotyping is concerned.

I believe Dr. Martin Luther King's dream is not just limited to America but it encompasses all countries and territories where black and coloured people are marginalized solely due to the colour of their skin. To us in the Caribbean, this dream gave us hope and encouragement at a time when black consciousness was nothing more than an infant's fancy in a tyrant's world. Haiti will forever be the greatest example of the struggle of black people around the world. A country which fought for its freedom to become the first free black sovereign state; yet today it remains the poorest country in the western hemisphere. King's dream could not have been fulfilled if Haiti was still allowed to exist in its state of under-development and social and political unrest. He would have wanted America to not just aid Haiti in times of crises but help develop and nurture its people, its resources and its landscape. It is because of the same United States of America that Haiti is in the position it is in today. The virtual embargos on trade and the repatriation of 21 billion dollars (US) to France helped to greatly under-develop this black nation. Had President Obama's election been the fulfillment of such a noble dream, then Haiti would be far better off than it is now. Does this represent the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream? This demonstrates that although an African American has attained the highest office in the U.S.A., injustice still runs rampant throughout the tentacles of Government through misguided and manipulative philosophies.

Throughout the long history of oppression, black people have borne many injustices and atrocities. Almost four decades and eight months after the Dr. Martin Luther King's death, racial tension and injustice became the highlight of the media again, in what would be known as the Jena Six case. Six African-American teenagers were charged and convicted of the battery of Justin Barker. While it is true that these young men did injure a fellow student, their initial charges were viewed as too extreme and were perceived as spiked due to racial profiling. Don't you think it would be unjust to charge these young boys for "attempted second degree murder"? Jena High School was rife with racial tension preceding the Jena Six incident. The hanging of nooses from a tree in the courtyard, the segregation of the black students sitting on bleachers by the auditorium and white students sitting under the "white tree" bears out this notion. It is therefore clear to see that altercations between whites and blacks were inevitable. While I do not condone the act of violence, we cannot condemn these young black men with an unnecessary and discriminatory severity. Dr. King would have agreed, as he did state, "Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood." However, it is clear that we have not risen out of those sands just yet.

Dr. King said, "One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity." In America, the plight of the displaced New Orleans residents is still fresh in our minds. It is of particular relevance that Business Week reported in their 2000 census data that the Caucasian population earned an average of \$31,971 while blacks earned \$11,332. This inequitable distribution of income exacerbated an already saddening situation of poverty when Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. Residents were asked to leave if they could, but many people did not have the means. In a disaster that claimed over 1500 lives and left 80% of the city flooded, it must be noted the level of response to such a crisis. The international community responded with compassion and generosity but they also criticized the United States for racism and

for failing to recognize the plight of these citizens. The response by the federal government was seen as tardy and it is widely speculated that this slow response could have been attributed to the fact that those affected were of the African American race, and therefore were not held in high esteem by those in authority. Although former President Bush admitted to some deficiencies in the response of the federal Government, the question of race still looms large in the psyche of those who have been oppressed by the system for so long. The notion that a Government's response to disaster may be based on race sounds ludicrous but it remains real. Is this the equality Dr. King dreamed of?

Dr. King declared, "We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice." But has this check been cashed as yet, or will it ever be cashed? No! While it is true that the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are all unalienable to each man and woman despite any discriminatory factors such as age, race and colour, can there really ever be equality and equity among races in America and by extension the world? Dr. King's dream, though admirable and noble, is something that we as human beings may never attain. Our imperfections, due to our human nature, cause us to make mistakes and errors against our fellow man, ourselves and even the environment. Can a world of perfect harmony ever be designed and maintained by human minds and hands? It would be erroneous of us to think such a thing. I am reminded of the mantra of my present Principal "we aim at perfection but we settle for excellence" because in this life nothing is perfect and theory does not always translate into practicality.

Therefore in my final analysis of the question: "Does the election of President Barack Obama represent the fulfillment of Dr. Martin Luther King's dream or is it only one milestone along a longer road to full equality?" I would have to say without a doubt that I believe it is a milestone. The road to full equality is long and we may never reach the end of the journey but that must not discourage us from trying to reach for it. The journey of 1000 miles begins with one step. While I do believe that had Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. been alive today to see Barack Obama elected as President he would have said, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!", I would be the first one to stand and shout "We have simply taken another step, true freedom is yet to come!"